



CUISINE DE CRITTERS

BY LISA TREEN, MUTT-STER CHEF

No More Raw Meaty Bones! Doctor's Orders



Something very strange occurred in our household a few weeks into January. I thought I was seeing things. Or more accurately, I thought something was missing. A part of our dog Lilly's head. It was as if the right hand side had sunken in.

"Hey Paul," I called. "Do you see what I do? Look at this side of Lilly's head. Is it partially caved in or am I going mad?"

We both examine Lil's head and Paul concurs that there is a definite dip in Lilly's head. Weird!

Of course I would never advocate going onto Google and trying self diagnose a medical condition, but curiosity got the better of me.

I type in 'my dog's head has caved in', and Dr Google comes up with all sorts of interesting factoids and forum

discussions on this topic. MMM or Masticatory Muscle Myositis is a condition where the muscles of the head shrink. It's an inflammatory disease that affects the jaws of the dog. The term masticatory tells us that this disease involves the part of the dog's body involved in mastication (chewing). As your dog chews, it uses the large muscles located on the top and side of the head. These muscles have a unique muscle protein composition.

With MMM, a dog's own immune system starts to attack that special protein found only in those muscles. 2M fibres are found in a dog's jaw muscles and are not found elsewhere in the body. Because 2M fibres closely resemble proteins found on the surface of bacteria, the immune system recognises these proteins as foreign to the body and starts attacking them, resulting in inflammation. Thank you Dr Google.



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As Lilly was acting pretty normal, didn't seem like she was in any pain, and wasn't off her food, we decided we didn't need to rush to the vet but organised a consultation the next day.

The prognosis was correct. Lilly has MMM and is now on steroids twice a day.

Lilly's MMM seemed to happen over night — the visible signs at least. But in retrospect there were signs that we now realise was part of the slow creep of this disease.

Often when we tossed food to her, she wouldn't grab it mid-air like normal. Instead she would allow food to drop to the ground. She refused to tackle large bones, preferring to leave them. Even small bones were treated gingerly. Paul even made a comment about some chop-sized bones that Lilly had 'de-meated' — she wouldn't actually consume the bone at all. Odd behaviour for a dog that was once considered a bone eating champion!

MMM isn't life threatening and, for the most part, can improve with treatment. Dogs with MMM can't fully open their mouths, and the movement in trying to do so is quite painful. If left untreated, the condition will continue to deteriorate to the point where only soft foods can be administered.

The side effects of the steroids are text-book. Lilly has an insatiable appetite. Our dog was never a food trawler, unlike Scooter who has earned a dubious reputation for being a land shark! Lilly never nagged for food or pestered us in the kitchen. The steroids have changed that.

She also has an increased thirst so we have to be even more vigilant with checking their huge waterbowl, otherwise she'll want to drink the water from the pool, and that's not healthy.



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To stop her from gulping food, our vet, Dr Michael Kidd from Hurlstone Park Vets, asked us to get her a special bowl that slows down the eating process. There's a few on the market, and for dreadful gulpers I always recommend a Bob-A-Lot, where a whole cup of food can be dispersed with just a few kibbles at a time.

Dr Kidd has also stressed that Lil cannot have any more bones for fear of choking.

No more meaty bones?

Does this mean my dog's teeth will suffer? I've always fed bones regularly and have been quite proud of the fact that all my dogs have had healthy gums and pearly whites, even into their declining senior years. Will Lilly-pop's teeth start to rot? We hope not, but with her limited ability to open her mouth, it is unlikely that I'll be able to get a toothbrush back there.

I've always supplemented a high quality dry food with bones and other goodies. One of my favourite and budget busting additions are sardines. Whether fresh from a fishmonger or the el-cheapo version from a can, these little stinky fish can pack a punch.

The dogs like theirs straight from the can and drizzled over their food. Our cat is more delicate and prefers the fresh variety. She leaves the head and tail in her bowl so now we just chop both ends off for her. And I like them fresh from the barbeque with a little seasoning. I've included a recipe that I love to share with friends — Sardines Escabeche. This recipe originates from Spain but can be found in various forms in Mexico and the Philippines, and requires the sardines to marinate in its acidic and delicious ingredients for a few hours or overnight. It's a great dish to prepare one day before a dinner party or barbeque and is best served with crusty bread.

SARDINES & RICE

This recipe is suitable for cats and dogs. The added parsley freshens breath too.

Ingredients:

- 2 cans of flat tinned sardines
- 2/3 cup of cooked brown rice
- 1 tbs chopped chicken liver (approx 2 livers)
- 2 tbs chopped parsley

Method:

Combine all ingredients and mash the sardines up into smallish pieces.

With dogs, serve over their normal food. Cats can have this served on its own. Store any remaining mix in the fridge and use within two days.

SARDINE TRAINING TREAT COOKIES

Ingredients:

- 1 cup whole wheat (wholemeal) flour
- ½ cup cornmeal (polenta)
- ½ cup lactose free milk
- 1 can sardines, drained

Method:

Preheat oven to 180 °C

In a large mixing bowl add the flour, cornmeal and milk and mix together. Finely chop the sardines and then add to the flour mixture. Knead with your hands until well mixed.

On a floured surface, roll out the dough until it's about 1/2cm thick. Cut into shapes and place on baking sheet lined with baking paper.

Bake for about 25 minutes or until cookies are golden brown. Transfer to a wire rack and cool. Keep treats in an airtight container in the fridge and use within three days. Treats can also be frozen.



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SARDINES ESCABECHE (for humans only)

Ingredients:

1kg fresh sardines, cleaned
3 tbs (1/4 cup) plain flour
150ml extra virgin olive oil
1 red onion, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 carrot, thinly sliced
2 tbs chopped flat-leaf parsley
2 fresh bay leaves
1 tsp black peppercorns
3-4 thyme sprigs
1 tsp cumin seeds
1/2 cup (125ml) dry white wine
1 tsp sugar
1/3 cup (4 tbs) wine or sherry vinegar
Crusty bread, to serve

Method:

Rinse sardines and pat dry with a paper towel. In a bowl place flour and season with salt and pepper. Lightly dust the sardines in the flour mixture and shake off excess.

Start with 2 tablespoons of oil and heat in a medium sized frying pan. Cook the sardines in batches until just cooked for about two minutes each side. Drain on a paper towel and place in a ceramic or glass dish.

Wipe out the frying pan and add remaining oil and cook onion until softened but not browned. Add garlic and carrot and cook for about 1 minute. Add remaining ingredients and 1/3 cup of water and let simmer for 2-3 minutes until liquid is reduced slightly. Pour over sardines and allow to cool and then cover and marinate in the fridge overnight. Serve with your favourite crusty bread.



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